



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

For immediate release: March 2, 2010 (10-04)

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Contact: Mike Louisell (360) 902-1813

P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, Washington 98504-2560

Visit our Web site at: agr.wa.gov

WSDA program offers protection to consumers and businesses

National Weights and Measures Week March 1-7

OLYMPIA – When you buy two pounds of apples, 15 gallons of gas, or a cord of firewood, how do you know you’ve gotten what you paid for?

Washington consumers should know that someone is looking at the thousands of weighing and measuring devices involved in everyday commercial transactions to ensure fairness in the marketplace. To recognize the agency’s inspectors, the Washington State Department of Agriculture is celebrating National Weights and Measures Week, March 1-7.

“From inspecting fuel pumps and liquefied gas meters to luggage or grain scales, our inspectors help make sure devices are working correctly to protect both consumers and businesses,” said program manager Kirk Robinson. “Consumers could be getting shorted or the business could be giving away too much product or losing money if devices aren’t operating correctly.”

Calls about alleged vehicle fuel overcharges and octane problems, firewood shortages and scanner price errors prompt the majority of complaints. The program received 725 complaints in 2009 and nearly 800 complaints in 2008. About 22 percent of the complaints WSDA receives are valid.

Based on consumer concerns, inspectors began testing luggage scales at airports last year as airlines began charging baggage overweight fees. This year, inspectors are also checking store shelves to monitor compliance with a new state law requiring a bittering agent in antifreeze products. Antifreeze can poison children, pets and wildlife.

Some 70,000 weighing and measuring devices are used for the sale of goods in Washington. Scales, scanners and other measuring devices can be out of adjustment just like any other mechanical equipment. WSDA tests and inspects commercial devices, verifies scanner prices, inspects packages and beverage containers for count or volume, and monitors fuel quality. Its metrology laboratory maintains standards for mass, volume, and length in order to provide reliable measurement services for government and industry.

Testing fuel pump meters and checking motor fuel quality is one of the more visible services. Consumers can plainly see the inspection sticker on pumps and contact WSDA when they have a concern.

“With high fuel costs, we are all keenly aware of consumers’ interest in our work to ensure fuel pumps are accurate and that the fuel meets quality standards,” said Robinson, who serves on the board of directors for the National Conference of Weights & Measures.

MORE

National Weights & Measures Week is designed to recognize the important service to the community performed by weights and measures programs. In Washington, the cities of Seattle and Spokane also have their weights and measures programs to handle inspections under their jurisdiction.

When it comes to assuring a level playing field, WSDA's 14 inspectors can't do the job alone.

Consumers play an important role. Robinson offers tips:

- Make sure the measuring or weighting device reads zero at the beginning.
- If the meter or scale does not read zero, tell the attendant or cashier.
- Be aware. Watch the check-stand register. Watch the gas pump. Keep track of what's going on.
- If you run into a problem that isn't resolved on the spot, contact WSDA's Weights & Measures Program at (360) 902-1857 or e-mail WSDA at wtsmeasures@agr.wa.gov.
- Consumers can also go to WSDA's Web site at www.agr.wa.gov and click on the [consumer protection page](#) from the left-column menu.

#